

U.S. Consulate General in Krakow Celebrates 35th Anniversary



Consulate building in Stolarska Street

2009 marks not only the 90th anniversary of Polish-U.S. diplomatic relations but also the 35th anniversary of the American Consulate General in Krakow. The following is a brief history of the U.S. diplomatic presence in Krakow and the building housing the U.S. Consulate on Stolarska Street.

The U.S. government expressed an interest in opening a consulate in Krakow after the end of World War II. American Ambassador Arthur Bliss Lane reached an understanding with the first post-World War II Polish government allowing the United States to establish at least four American consulates throughout Poland. Under this agreement, the American government began preparations to establish a consulate in Krakow.

Prior to the public opening of a consulate in Krakow, the U.S. Department of State sent several officials to the city. One of the first American vice-consuls to arrive in Krakow in 1946 was Malcolm Tomb. Tomb would later become a highly respected senior diplomat serving as American ambassador to Belgrade, Moscow, Prague, and Tel Aviv. Upon retiring from the U.S. Department of State, he headed

the U.S.-Russia Joint Commission on POWs/MIAs.

The first American Consulate established in Krakow opened to the public on July 1, 1946. However, with Cold War tensions beginning to escalate, the American government decided to close the Consulate to the public less than a year later on April 15, 1947. Two days afterwards, the American officials staffing the Consulate were officially withdrawn from Krakow, effectively ending the American government's diplomatic presence in Malopolska for the next twenty-three years.

During the 1960s, the American government became interested in re-establishing a consulate in Krakow. At first Polish authorities were reluctant, privately citing concerns that the Soviet Union would object to the American presence. After lengthy consultations between Polish and American officials, the Polish Foreign Ministry modified its position. In 1970, the Polish Foreign Ministry agreed that the American government could open a cultural center in Krakow in lieu of a full-fledged consulate.

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In 1970, the United States Information Agency (USIA) established the American Cultural Center in Krakow. Victor Grey, an American diplomat who worked for USIA, single-handedly prepared and opened the center, housed in a villa located on ul. Grottgera. Today the villa remains in use by the American government, now serving as the residence of the American Consul General. Although his primary task in Krakow was to promote cultural interchange between Poland and the United States, Grey was constantly swamped by requests for consular services (particularly visas).

Shortly after the USIA Cultural Center was opened, the Polish government requested permission from the American government to establish a consulate in New York. In exchange for this, the Polish Foreign Ministry agreed the American government could establish a formal consulate in Krakow. The full-fledged U.S. Consulate was opened in 1974 at its present location at ul. Stolarska 9, and the operations of the USIA Culture Center were merged into the newly-founded U.S. Consulate. Four American Foreign Service officers and fourteen locally employed Polish nationals staffed the new American Consulate in Krakow.

One of the main functions of the American Consulate in Krakow has always been consular services. Within a few short years of the Consulate's opening, over 10,000 visa cases were being processed in Krakow annually. In addition, the Consulate provided the local American community (primarily several hundred university students) with typical consular services such as issuing passports, providing notary services, etc. As workload volumes increased, the staff grew to include six American Foreign Service officers and over twenty-two locally employed Polish nationals. In the 1980's, the workload and staffing continued to expand. By 1987, the U.S. Department of State upgraded the status of the Consulate in Krakow, designating it as a Consulate General.

Throughout the Communist-era, a special rela-

tionship blossomed between the Consulate and the average residents of Malopolska. At this time, the Consulate served as one of the few unbiased sources of news for locals when Poland was under strict censorship. When local Solidarity members sought information on how labor unions formed in the United States, they turned to the Consulate for information. During protests in Krakow's main market square, American consular officers were hosed by water cannons along with the protestors. Occasionally at Pod Jaszczurami, a local club popular with students, a consul would show American films which were not locally available. Just as the Consulate offered locals with a link to the outside world, the Consulate was also one of the few windows by which Americans could witness the lives of average Poles under communist rule.

Today the U. S. Consulate General in Krakow has an active Public Affairs Section and a busy Consular Services Section. During 2008, the Consulate General processed nearly 40,000 visa applications and provided consular services to the local American population (which is estimated at 5,000 people). At present, the Consulate General is staffed by ten American Foreign Service officers and forty-seven locally hired Polish employees.



Entrance to the Consulate before renovation

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Many senior American officials have visited Krakow, including American presidents and various members of presidential cabinets. The first official visit by an acting American president to Krakow occurred in July 1975, when President Gerald R. Ford traveled to the region during a state visit. In 1996, then First Lady Hillary Rodham Clinton visited Krakow during a goodwill tour across Central and Eastern Europe. President George W. Bush, traveling with Secretary of State Colin Powell, visited Krakow in 2003. While in Krakow, President Bush visited the Auschwitz-Birkenau Nazi Concentration Camp, the first sitting American president to do so.

Stolarska 9

The history of the current buildings housing the U.S. Consulate General in Krakow is not well documented.

Historians believe that portions of the Consulate's front building were probably constructed during the 14th century. All that remains of this first structure are the building's foundations and gothic-style cellars, which would have

been at street level seven centuries ago.

The building housing the Consular Section is believed to have been built during the late 14th or early 15th century, decades after the Consulate's main building was built. The original foundations, cellar and portions of the ground floor exist just as they did six centuries ago.

Both of the Consulate's buildings were rebuilt in the Baroque style during the 17th or 18th century. These structures suffered an unknown amount of damage during the great fire of 1850. Following the fire, undoubtedly both of the buildings were refurbished, redesigned and/or rebuilt. During the twentieth century, both buildings also underwent significant renovations.

The U.S. Consulate General would like to thank Mr. Carl Bastiani (Principal Officer, U.S. Consulate Krakow 1979-1983) and the State Department's Bureau of Overseas Building Operations for assistance in preparing this history.



Consulate courtyard